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POLICY PLANNING STAFF

RECOGNITION OF NEW VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT

December 10, 1948

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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RECOGNITION OF
NEW VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT

Mr. Lovett:

In response to your request, the Policy Planning Staff has examined the question of the recognition of the new government in Venezuela. In doing so, it has consulted with the interested officers of ARA and has given careful consideration to their views.

It has come to the following conclusions:

(1) It cannot be demonstrated that any useful purpose would be served by a protracted withholding of recognition of the new Venezuelan government. United States recognition should be accorded after an interval neither so short as to be undignified nor so long as to make a prestige issue of the recognition question.

(2) On the other hand, this Government should find suitable means at the time recognition is extended to reiterate its view that the use of force as an instrument of political change is deplorable, inconsistent with the acknowledged ideals of American Republics and increasingly dangerous to all countries on this Hemisphere. It should be stressed that we cannot remain indifferent to this sort of thing, and that if there is an increased resort to this sort of procedure in other American countries, this will create a serious issue which will have to engage the attention of the American community as a whole.

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The reasons for these conclusions are the following:

(1) With respect to recognition:

(a) The normal policy of this Government, as embodied in PPS/24 of March 19, 1948, approved by the Secretary, would be to extend recognition in a case of this sort, provided there is no impelling contrary consideration of national interest.

The following paragraphs from that paper are pertinent in this connection:

> "10. Recognition of a government by the United States should imply neither approval nor disapproval of the policies of that government with respect to strictly domestic affairs.
>
> "11. Recognition should not be withheld as a political weapon or to express moral censure except in extreme cases when U.S. national interests would be served thereby."

If, therefore, we were to withhold recognition, we should have to be able to show strong and unusual reasons for doing so.

(b) In the present case recognition is recommended by our representative on the spot, who expresses the opinion that "our national interests in Venezuela would on balance be best served by recognizing Junta" and that it "should neither be too hastily done nor too long delayed."

(c) If we were to withhold recognition, we would have to be fairly sure that we could see before us, as a result of our taking this position, a probable favorable course of events. In the present case, we cannot see that

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As far as the internal affairs in Venezuela are concerned, there appears to be greater likelihood of an orderly political procedure, eventually involving popular elections and peaceful regularization of government, if the new regime is encouraged to carry out its present promises than if we attempt to oppose it by international action.

As for the international situation, although the only three American countries which already have recognized the new regime are Argentina, Peru, and Paraguay, the neighbor most immediately concerned--Colombia--has every intention of doing so. If we withhold recognition, the question arises of the extent to which our position will be supported by other American governments. A few of them probably would stand with us, but if most of the others do not support us our withholding of recognition presumably will not achieve any decisive results; eventually we will presumably have to recognize; in this event, we will give a gratuitous prestige bonus to the new regime. If on the other hand, most of the American countries do support us, then we will have achieved at best a conspicuous split in the American community over a thorny and difficult issue. There might be merit in this if we had come to the deliberate conclusion that we wished to make this a major issue at this time, with a view to the total elimination of further changes of government by force in the area.

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However, we have not made such a determination or even examined it thoroughly; and there is little likelihood that we would find, on further study, that this is a suitable time for such a move, nor that the question of recognition would be a suitable touchstone.

(d) In the light of the above, it seems evident to us that non-recognition is not a suitable weapon for influencing the course of internal events in Venezuela at this time.

(e) In these circumstances, we should be careful to make sure that the recognition question does not attain in the public mind a prestige significance. That means that recognition should appear to come as the result of a normal and considered decision, but not as a favorable judgment on the character of the Venezuelan regime.

On the other hand, we should not show any undignified haste and should not rush in to join the Argentine and others as the first countries to extend such recognition.

(2) Statement of our Basic Position

The Preamble of the Rio Pact contained the following passage.

> "That the American regional community affirms as a manifest truth that juridical organization is a necessary prerequisite of security and peace, and that peace is founded on justice and moral order and, consequently, on the international recognition and protection of human rights and freedoms, on the indispensable well-being of the people, and on the effectiveness of democracy for the international realization of justice and security."

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We consider it important that, in according recognition to the new Venezuelan regime, we do it in such a way that it cannot be interpreted as a departure by this Government from the principles of the Rio Treaty cited above. There is a danger that in view of the initial extension of recognition by Argentina and Peru, United States recognition might be interpreted as a gesture of approval for the domestic quality of the new regime.

There are a number of ways in which the basic position of this Government on the point of question can be brought before world opinion at the time recognition is extended. This question should be decided in the Department, as an operational matter.

George F. Kennan